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XVII.—PROFESSOR CHILD AND THE BALLAD.

In the course of his insistence upon the necessity of a continued recognition of the popular ballad as a distinct literary type, Professor Gummere points out the value of a collection of Professor Child's critical remarks on the ballad and an attempt to determine their general drift.¹ Such is the purpose of the present paper. Aside from the article in the *Universal Cyclopaedia*, Professor Child's comments are mere *obiter dicta*, based upon no underlying principle and forming no part of a set purpose. They are, therefore, not easy to classify; the attempt to reduce them to order can be only partially successful, and any arrangement must appear more or less arbitrary. Yet some arrangement has seemed advisable and they have been roughly grouped under the following headings: (1) Authorship and Transmission; (2) Subject-Matter; (3) Technique; (4) A Comparison of the *Ballads* of 1857–1859 and *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* of 1882–1898; (5) A Collection of General Comments upon Specific Ballads; (6) Summary.

¹ *Modern Philology*, I, 377 f.

I.

In that article in the *Universal Cyclopaedia* which Professor Child "wished to be neither quoted nor regarded as final,"¹ but which must here be combined with other tentative or fragmentary statements, he defined the *popular ballad* as "a distinct and very important species of poetry. Its historical and natural place," he said, "is anterior to the appearance of the poetry of art, to which it has formed a step, and by which it has been regularly displaced, and, in some cases, all but extinguished. Whenever a people in the course of its development reaches a certain intellectual and moral stage, it will feel an impulse to express itself, and the form of expression to which it is first impelled is, as is well known, not prose, but verse, and in fact narrative verse. The condition of society in which a truly national or popular poetry appears explains the character of such poetry. It is a condition in which the people are not divided by political organization and book-culture into markedly distinct classes, in which consequently there is such community of ideas and feelings that the whole people form an individual. Such poetry, accordingly, while it is in its essence an expression of our common human nature, and so of universal and indestructible interest, will in each case be differenced by circumstances and idiosyncrasy. On the other hand, it will always be an expression of the mind and heart of the people as an individual, and never of the personality of individual men. The fundamental characteristic of popular ballads is therefore the absence of subjectivity and of self-consciousness. Though they do not 'write themselves,' as William Grimm has said, though a man and not a people has composed them, still the author counts for nothing, and it

¹ Professor Gummere in *Modern Philology*, 1, 378.

is not by mere accident, but with the best reason, that they have come down to us anonymous. Hence, too, they are extremely difficult to imitate by the highly civilized modern man, and most of the attempts to reproduce this kind of poetry have been ridiculous failures.

“The primitive ballad, then, is popular, not in the sense of something arising from and suited to the lower orders of a people. As yet, no sharp distinction of high and low exists, in respect to knowledge, desires, and tastes. An increased civilization, and especially the introduction of book-culture, gradually gives rise to such a division; the poetry of art appears; the popular poetry is no longer relished by a portion of the people, and is abandoned to an uncultivated or not over-cultivated class—a constantly diminishing number.”

But “the popular ballad is not originally the product or the property of the lower orders of the people. Nothing, in fact, is more obvious than that many of the ballads of the now most refined nations had their origin in that class whose acts and fortunes they depict—the upper class—though the growth of civilization has driven them from the memory of the highly polished and instructed, and has left them as an exclusive possession to the uneducated. The genuine popular ballad had its rise in a time when the distinctions since brought about by education and other circumstances had practically no existence. The vulgar ballads of our day, the ‘broadsides’ which were printed in such large numbers in England and elsewhere in the sixteenth century or later, belong to a different genus; they are products of a low kind of *art*, and most of them are, from a literary point of view, thoroughly despicable and worthless.

“Next it must be observed that ballads which have been handed down by long-repeated tradition have always departed considerably from their original form. If the transmission

has been purely through the mouths of unlearned people, there is less probability of willful change, but once in the hands of professional singers there is no amount of change which they may not undergo. Last of all comes the modern editor, whose so-called improvements are more to be feared than the mischances of a thousand years. A very old ballad will often be found to have resolved itself in the course of what may be called its propagation into several distinct shapes, and each of these again to have received distinct modifications. When the fashion of verse has altered, we shall find a change of form as great as that in the *Hildebrandslied*, from alliteration without stanza to stanza with rhyme. In all cases the language drifts insensibly from ancient forms, though not at the same rate with the language of every-day life. The professional ballad-singer or minstrel, whose sole object is to please the audience before him, will alter, omit, or add, without scruple, and nothing is more common than to find different ballads blended together.

“There remains the very curious question of the origin of the resemblances which are found in the ballads of different nations, the recurrence of the same incidents or even of the same story, among races distinct in blood and history, and geographically far separated.” It is not necessary to go back to a common ancestry to explain these resemblances. “The incidents of many ballads are such as might occur anywhere and at any time; and with regard to agreements that can not be explained in this way we have only to remember that tales and songs were the chief social amusement of all classes of people in all the nations of Europe during the Middle Ages, and that new stories would be eagerly sought for by those whose business it was to furnish this amusement, and be rapidly spread among the fraternity. A great effect was undoubtedly produced by the crusades, which both brought the chief European nations

into closer intercourse and made them acquainted with the East, thus facilitating the interchange of stories and greatly enlarging the stock."

This account of authorship and transmission may be illustrated and supplemented by *obiter dicta* from *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*. "The author counts for nothing;" the ballad is essentially anonymous: that *Expliceth quod Rychard Sheale means merely that The Hunting of the Cheviot* (162) "was of course part of his stock as minstrel; the supposition that he was the author is preposterous in the extreme."¹

Ballads are at their best when "the transmission has been purely through the mouths of unlearned people," when they have come down by domestic tradition, through knitters and weavers. *Glasgerion* (67, B) "is mainly of good derivation (a poor old woman in Aberdeenshire)."² And "no Scottish ballads are superior in kind to those recited in the last century by Mrs Brown, of Falkland."³ Yet even upon Mrs Brown printed literature may have had some influence: in *Fause Foodrage* (89), "the resemblance in the verse in A 31, 'The boy stared wild like a gray gose-hawke,' to one in 'Hardyknute,' 'Norse een like gray goss-hawk stared wild,' struck Sir Walter Scott as suspicious," and "it is quite possible that Mrs Brown may unconsciously have adopted this verse from the tiresome and affected Hardyknute, so much esteemed in her day."⁴ A literary treatment of a ballad theme may affect the traditional versions of that ballad. In the case of *Child Maurice* (83) "the popularity of the play [Home's *Douglas*] seems to have given vogue to the ballad. The sophisticated copy passed into recitation, and may very likely have more or less infected those which were repeated from earlier tradi-

¹ III, 303.

² II, 136.

³ I, vii.

⁴ II, 296.

tion.”¹ A whole ballad may even be completely derived from print, and yet, in the course of time, revert to the popular form. Of this same ballad, *Child Maurice*, “Mr Aytoun considers that E is only the copy printed in the middle of the last century purged, in the process of oral transmission, of what was not to the popular taste, ‘and altered more.’ There is no doubt that a copy learned from print may be transformed in this way, but it is certain that old tradition does not come to a stop when a ballad gets into print.”²

Not only the possible influence of print is to be taken into account; much depends on the material to which the reciter was exposed and upon his selection. “It will not . . . help the ballad [*Young Bearwell* (302)] much that it was not palmed off on Buchan in jest or otherwise, or even if it was learned from an old person by Mr Nicol in his youth. The intrinsic character of the ballad remains, and old people have sometimes burdened their memory with worthless things.”³ Editors were not the only interpolators; of *The Twa Sisters* (10), A, a, 11–13, need not have been written, but “might easily be extemporized by any singer of sufficiently bad taste.”⁴ The varying memory of reciters, too, was a cause of unintentional change. Thus “Mrs Brown was not satisfied with A b [of *Bonny Baby Livingston* (222)], which Jamieson had taken down from her mouth, and after a short time she sent him A a. The verbal differences are considerable. We need not suppose that Mrs Brown had heard two ‘sets’ or ‘ways,’ of which she blended the readings; the fact seems to be that, at the time when she recited to Jamieson, she was not in good

¹ II, 263. An old woman (the reciter of E) knew *Child Morice* as a child, but later learned *Gil Morice* which began to be more fashionable. II, 264.

² II, 464, n.

³ V, 178.

⁴ I, 119.

condition to remember accurately.”¹ In general, however, the folk memory is remarkable for its tenacity. “Most of the [Danish] versions [of *Earl Brand* (7)] from recitation are wonderful examples and proofs of the fidelity with which simple people ‘report and hold’ old tales: for, as the editor has shown, verses which never had been printed, but which are found in old manuscripts, are now met with in recited copies; and these recited copies, again, have verses that occur in no Danish print or manuscript, but which nevertheless are found in Norwegian and Swedish recitations, and, what is more striking, in Icelandic tradition of two hundred years’ standing.”²

The ballad does not remain in the possession of the simple folk, or of reciters of Mrs Brown’s instinctive good taste. Its best fortune is then perhaps to fall into the hands of children, like *The Maid Freed From the Gallows* (95), of which “F had become a children’s game, the last stage of many old ballads.”³ Again, “it is interesting to find the ballad [*The Twa Brothers* (49)] still in the mouths of children in American cities,—in the mouths of the poorest, whose heritage these old things are.”⁴ *Sir Hugh* (155) in the form of *Little Harry Hughes and the Duke’s Daughter*, was heard, says Mr Newell, “from a group of colored children, in the streets of New York city,” and traced “to a little girl living in one of the cabins near Central Park.”⁵

Less happy is the fate of the ballad when it falls into the hands of professional singers,—the Minstrel Ballad is to be considered presently,—or when it falls into the hands of amateurs of various sorts, who corrupt and debase it. *Hind Etin* (41) “has suffered severely by the accidents of

¹ IV, 231.

² I, 89. See also the comment on Apollodorus and the Cretan fairy-tale, I, 337, quoted, p. 774, below.

³ II, 346.

⁴ I, 435.

⁵ Quoted, III, 254.

tradition. A has been not simply damaged by passing through low mouths, but has been worked over by low hands. Something considerable has been lost from the story, and fine romantic features, preserved in Norse and German ballads, have been quite effaced.”¹ Of *The Clerk's Twa Sons o' Owsenford* (72) “D has some amusing dashes of prose, evidently of masculine origin. [Examples follow]. We have here a strong contrast with both the blind-beggar and the housemaid style of corruption ; something suggesting the attorney's clerk rather than the clerk of Owsenford, but at least not mawkish.”² The “blind beggar” is, of course, Buchan's collector, and whether he or the editor was responsible for the corruptions is not always clear. The blind beggar himself, however, comes in for special condemnation in the comment on *The Bent Sae Brown* (71) : “The introduction and conclusion, and some incidental decorations, of the Scottish ballad will not be found in the Norse, but are an outcome of the invention and the piecing and shaping of that humble but enterprising rhapsodist who has left his trail over so large a part of Buchan's volumes.”³ In *Brown Robin* (97) “the story undoubtedly stops at the right point in A, with the escape of the two lovers to the wood. The sequel in C is not at all beyond the inventive ability of Buchan's blind beggar, and some other blind beggar may have contrived the cane and the whale, the shooting and the hanging, in B.”⁴ As type of the housemaid style of corruption may, perhaps, stand *Lizzie Lindsay* (226). “Leezie Lindsay from a maid-servant in Aberdeen,” wrote Jamieson to Scott of A b.⁵ And, “in his preface to B, Kinloch remarks that the ballad is very popular in the North, ‘and few milk-maids in that quarter but can chaunt it.’”⁶

¹ I, 360.

² II, 173.

³ II, 170.

⁴ II, 368.

⁵ IV, 255, n.

⁶ IV, 255.

“Ballads of this description [a young lord o the Hielands, pretending that he is the son of an auld shepherd and an auld dey, persuades a young lady of Edinburgh to fly with him to the Highlands, where he at length reveals his identity]—ballads of this description are peculiarly liable to interpolation and debasement, and there are two passages, each occurring in several versions, which we may, without straining, set down to some plebeian improver.”¹

Not mere corruption, but serving-man authorship, even, is suggested for *Tom Potts* (109): “Such events [unequal matches] would be celebrated only by fellows of the yeoman or of the foot-boy, and surely in the present case the minstrel was not much above the estate of the serving-man. Lord Jockey’s reckless liberality throughout, and Lord Phoenix’s in the end, is a mark of the serving-man’s ideal nobleman.”² Again as mere corrupter, rather than author, appears the ostler in one version of *Bewick and Graham* (211). In the 1833 edition of *The Border Minstrelsy* “deficiencies were partly supplied and some different readings adopted ‘from a copy obtained by the recitation of an ostler in Carlisle.’” g “is shown by internal evidence to be the ostler’s copy. Both copies [g and h] were indisputably derived from print, though h may have passed through several mouths. g agrees with b—f closely as to minute points of phraseology which it is difficult to believe that a reciter would have retained. It looks more like an immediate, though faulty, transcript from print.”³ Contrasting styles are suggested in the comment on *The Broomfield Hill* (43): “The editor [of the broadside, “differing as to four or five words only from F”] remarks that A is evidently taken from F; from which it is clear that the pungent buckishness of the broadside does not necessarily make an impression.

¹ iv, 256. Cf. B 10, D 10, E 19; F 11; E 10, F 6.

² II, 441.

³ iv, 144.

A smells of the broom ; F suggests the groom.”¹ Perhaps not to be classed with these non-professional corrupters or interpolaters is the bänkelsänger who is responsible for one of the German versions of *Lady Isabel and the Elf Knight* (4) : “M smacks decidedly of the bänkelsänger, and has an appropriate moral at the tail : *animi index cauda !*”² Perhaps he is to be regarded as a humble sort of minstrel ; to the comments on this class we may now turn our attention.

It does not appear from Professor Child’s remarks whether he thought of the minstrel as composing his ballads,—or making them over,—orally or in writing. Perhaps we are to suppose that he followed now one method, now the other. Rychard Sheale may be supposed to have affixed his “expliceth” to his written copy of *Chevy Chase* ; yet it is “*quod Rychard Sheale*” as if the manuscript had been written by another from his singing. But whether the ballad passed through the minstrel’s mouth or through his hands, it received some peculiar and characteristic modifications. Thus *The Boy and the Mantle* (29), *King Arthur and King Cornwall* (30), and *The Marriage of Sir Gawain* (31) “are clearly not of the same rise, and not meant for the same ears, as those which go before. They would come down by professional rather than by domestic tradition, through minstrels rather than knitters and weavers. They suit the hall better than the bower, the tavern or public square better than the cottage, and would not go to the spinning-wheel at all. An exceedingly good piece of minstrelsy ‘*The Boy and the Mantle*’ is, too ; much livelier than most of the numerous variations on the somewhat overhandled theme.”³ *Crow and Pie* (111), likewise, “is not a purely popular ballad, but rather of that kind which,

¹ I, 391.

² I, 34.

³ I, 257.

for convenience, may be called the minstrel-ballad. It has, however, popular features, and markedly in stanzas 13, 14,"¹ —the damsels demanding the name of the man who has wronged her, a feature found in *The Bonny Hind* (50) and its continental parallels.² The term *minstrel* may, perhaps, be more loosely used in the passage which describes *The Rising in the North* (175) as "the work of a loyal but not unsympathetic minstrel;"³ in the statement concerning *Northumberland Betrayed by Douglas* (176), that "the ballad-minstrel acquaints us with circumstances concerning the surrender of Northumberland;"⁴ and in the statement to the effect that, in the case of *Tom Potts* (109), "the minstrel was not much above the estate of the serving-man."⁵

We may now attempt to construct an account of the vicissitudes to which the ballad was subject when, in the course of transmission, it sometimes found its way into writing and into print. Version B of *The Hunting of the Cheviot* (162) "is a striking but by no means a solitary example of the impairment which an old ballad would suffer when written over for the broadside press. This very seriously enfeebled edition was in circulation throughout the seventeenth century, and much sung despite its length. It is declared by Addison, in his appreciative and tasteful critique to be the favorite ballad of the common people of England."⁶ Similarly, in the case of *Sir Andrew Barton* (167), "a collation of A and B will show how ballads were retrenched and marred in the process of preparing them for the vulgar press."⁷ "B begins vilely, but does not go on so ill. The forty merchants coming 'with fifty sail' to King Henry on a mountain top requires to be taken indulgently."⁸ Though a broadside differs

¹ II, 478.

² Cf. I, 444 f.

³ III, 403.

⁴ III, 410.

⁵ II, 441.

⁶ III, 305.

⁷ III, 334.

⁸ III, 334, n.

widely from a true ballad, it is not to be supposed that,—at least in the examples included by Professor Child,—some general traits or special features peculiar to the popular or traditional matter or manner did not survive. Thus, although the ballad of *The Twa Knights* (268) “can have had no currency in Scotland, and perhaps was known only through print,” yet “a similar one is strictly traditional in Greece, and widely dispersed, both on the mainland and among the islands.”¹ Again, there are two broadsides of *King John and the Bishop* (45), which Professor Child does not include, “both inferior even to B, and in a far less popular style.”² There are, then, degrees of departure from the popular style. There are degrees of departure from the popular matter, also, and the broadside preserves sometimes but a single popular feature. Version M of *Young Beichan* (53) “was probably a broadside or stall copy, and is certainly of that quality, but preserves a very ancient traditional feature.”³ The broadside version of *The Broomfield Hill* (43) is distinguished by a “pungent buckishness,” which is not found in A, and which “suggests the groom.”⁴ A broadside may itself become tradition. The English version of *Lord Thomas and Fair Annet* (73) “is a broadside of Charles the Second’s time. . . . This copy has become traditional in Scotland and Ireland. The Scottish traditional copy . . . is far superior, and one of the most beautiful of our ballads, and indeed of all ballads.”⁵ The tradition lives, even after a ballad has found its way into print, and may influence and modify later versions of the printed form. Of *Prince Heathen* (104) “the fragment A . . . is partly explained by B, which is no doubt some stall-copy, reshaped from tradition.”⁶ Of *The Baffled Knight*

¹ v, 21.

² I, 404.

³ I, 455.

⁴ I, 391.

⁵ II, 180.

⁶ II, 424.

(112) "E is, in all probability, a broadside copy modified by tradition."¹ In origin, in any case, the broadsides in *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* are popular.² "There is a Scottish ballad [similar to *The Baffled Knight*] in which the tables are turned. . . . This, as being of comparatively recent, and not of popular, but of low literary origin, cannot be admitted here."³

"Last of all comes the modern editor," and from Professor Child's comments and skilful undoing of much of their work one might put together fairly complete accounts of the methods of Percy, Scott, Jamieson, Buchan, and the rest. We are concerned, however, not so much with the editors as with the results of their editing, with the kinds of change that the ballad suffered in their hands. It was often lengthened, in many cases by the combination of several versions. Thus Scott's version of *Tam Lin* (39, I), "as he himself states, was compounded of the Museum copy, Riddell's, Herd's, and 'several recitals from tradition.'"⁴ Of this use of materials from recitation examples are very numerous. Ballads were lengthened also by the interpolation of new stanzas. After Scott's edition, in the *Minstrelsy*, of *The Twa Sisters* (10), "Jamieson followed . . . with a tolerably faithful, though not, as he says, *verbatim*,⁵ publication of his copy of Mrs Brown's ballad,

¹ II, 480.

² The comparison of broadsides with traditional versions is instructive. See I, A, a, b, c; 10, A, a; 45, B; 53, L, M; 73, D; 104, B, 112, E (and II, 491); 110, A; 145, C; 151; 152; 153; 162, B; 167, B; 268. Much of the later Robin Hood poetry looks like "char-work done for the petty press" (III, 42). *Robin Hood Rescuing Will Stutely* (141) "is a ballad made for print, with little of the traditional in the matter and nothing in the style" (III, 185).

³ II, 480.

⁴ I, 335.

⁵ "Jamieson was not always precise in the account he gave of the changes he made in his texts" (IV, 255). Cf. also I, 138.

somewhat marred, too, by acknowledged interpolations.”¹ *King Henry* (32) was increased by Jamieson’s interpolations from twenty-two to thirty-four stanzas.² Scott’s version of *Fair Annie* (62, A) “was obtained ‘chiefly from the recitation of an old woman,’ but we are not informed who supplied the rest. Herd’s fragment, D, furnished stanzas 2–6, 12, 17, 19. A doubt may be hazarded whether stanzas 8–10 came from the old woman.”³ Interpolation and combination are here both illustrated. Scott’s later edition of *Tam Lin* (39) “was corrupted with eleven new stanzas, which are not simply somewhat of a modern cast as to diction, as Scott remarks, but of a grossly modern invention, and as unlike popular verse as anything can be.”⁴ Of his version of *Jellon Grame* (90) Scott says: “‘Some verses are apparently modernized.’” “The only very important difference between Scott’s version and Mrs Brown’s is its having four stanzas of its own, the four before the last two, which are evidently not simply modernized, but modern.”⁵

But the editor did not merely combine or interpolate; more vaguely, he “improved.” Version E of *The Fair Flower of Northumberland* (9), “a traditional version from the English border, has unfortunately been improved by some literary pen.”⁶ Or he “retouched,”⁷ or “altered,”⁸ or “emended.” Scott confesses to some emendation of *Kinmont Willy* (186); “it is to be suspected that a great deal more emendation was done than the mangling of reciters rendered absolutely necessary. One would like, for example, to see stanzas 10–12 and 31 in their mangled condition.”⁹ In general, no changes or additions are “in so glaring contrast with the groundwork as literary emenda-

¹ Stanzas 20, 21, 27, etc. I, 119. Cf. II, 83.

² I, 297.

³ II, 63 f.

⁴ I, 335.

⁵ II, 302.

⁶ I, 112.

⁷ IV, 5.

⁸ I, 138.

⁹ III, 472.

tions of traditional ballads.”¹ “Variations,” also, are to be noted: inaccuracies in *The Fire of Frendraught* (196) are acknowledged by Motherwell; “the implication is, or should be, that these variations are of editorial origin.”² Of *Sweet William’s Ghost* (77, A and B), “Percy remarks that the concluding stanza seems modern. There can be no doubt that both that and the one before it are modern; but, to the extent of Margaret’s dying on her lover’s grave, they are very likely to represent original verses not remembered in form.”³

Certain general results of transmission, of whatever kind, are to be noted. As a ballad passes from one country to another the nationality of the hero may be changed. In *Hugh Spencer’s Feats in France* (158) “Hugh is naturally turned into a Scotsman in the Scottish version, C.”⁴ The hero’s name is not more stable than his nationality. “In the course of transmission [of *John Thomson and the Turk* (266)], as has ever been the wont, names were changed, and also some subordinate circumstances.”⁵ Again, “the actual name of the hero of a ballad affords hardly a presumption as to who was originally the hero.”⁶ Even the part that he plays the hero may exchange with another character. “Robin Hood’s rescue of Little John, in *Guy of Gisborne*, after quarrelling with him on a fanciful provocation, is a partial offset for Little John’s heart-stirring generosity in this ballad. [*Robin Hood and the Monk* (119).] We have already had several cases of ballads in which the principal actors exchange parts.”⁷ The ballad, again, is not constant in its attachment to one locality, and “the topography of traditional ballads frequently presents difficulties, both because it is liable to be changed, wholly, or, what is more

¹ II, 428.

² IV, 39. Cf. II, 317.

³ II, 226.

⁴ III, 276.

⁵ V, 2.

⁶ II, 19.

⁷ III, 96.

embarrassing, partially, to suit a locality to which a ballad has been transported, and again because unfamiliar names, when not exchanged, are exposed to corruption.”¹ Thus, “in the ballad which follows this [*Rare Willie Drowned in Yarrow* (215)], a western variety of the same story, Willie is drowned in the Clyde.”²

The corruption of names is but one phase of the change to which all unfamiliar ballad diction is exposed. “At every stage of oral transmission we must suppose that some accidental variations from what was delivered would be introduced, and occasionally some wilful variations. Memory will fail at times; at times the listener will hear amiss, or will not understand, and a perversion of sense will ensue, or absolute nonsense,—nonsense which will be servilely repeated, and which repetition may make more gross. . . . Learned words do not occur in ballads; still an old native word will be in the same danger of metamorphosis. But, though unfamiliarity naturally ends in corruption, mishearing may have the like effect where the original phrase is in no way at fault. . . .

“It must be borne in mind, however, that as to nonsense the burden of proof rests always upon the expositor. His personal inability to dispose of a reading is not conclusive; his convictions may be strong, but patience and caution are his part and self-restraint as to conjectures.”³

In transmission, then, and even in the best of it, the ballad ordinarily fares but ill, “departs from the original form,” becomes less typically ballad; and, generally speaking, the older it is, the earlier it is caught and fixed in print, the better. Professor Child has thus special praise for those Robin Hood ballads which “have come down to us in comparatively ancient form.”⁴ *Robin Hood's Death* (120, B)

¹ iv, 156.

² iv, 178.

³ v, 309.

⁴ iii, 42.

is "in the fine old strain."¹ *Robin Hood and the Beggar* (134, II), "by far the best of the Robin Hood ballads of the secondary, so to speak cyclic, period," is "a composition of some antiquity,"² *Thomas Rymer* (37) "is an entirely popular ballad as to style, and must be of considerable age."³ One is not to expect in a late or modern ballad the excellence found in an early or ancient one. *Robin Hood's Chase* (146) "is a well-conceived ballad, and only needs to be older."⁴ *Walter Lesly* (296) is "a late, but life-like and spirited ballad."⁵ *The Hunting of the Cheviot* (162, B) "is a striking . . . example of the impairment which an old ballad would suffer when written over for the broadside press."⁶ Version M of *Young Beichan* (53) "was probably a broadside or stall copy, and is certainly of that quality, but preserves a very ancient traditional feature."⁷ The "ridiculous ballad" of *John Thomson and the Turk* (266) finds a place in the collection because it is "a seedling from an ancient and very notable story."⁸ *The Knight's Ghost* (265) "has not a perceptible globule of old blood in it, yet it has had the distinction of being more than once translated as a specimen of Scottish popular ballads."⁹ Scott's later edition of *Tam Lin* (39) "was corrupted with eleven new stanzas, which are not simply somewhat of a modern cast as to diction, as Scott remarks, but of a grossly modern invention, and as unlike popular verse as anything can be."¹⁰ Scott's version of *Jellon Grame* (90) has four stanzas of its own, "which are evidently not simply modernized, but modern."¹¹ Certain stanzas in version B b of *Archie o Cawfield* (188) "are indifferent modern stuff."¹² The "modern

¹ III, 103.² III, 159.³ I, 320.⁴ III, 206.⁵ V, 168.⁶ III, 305.⁷ I, 455.⁸ V, 1.⁹ IV, 437.¹⁰ I, 335.¹¹ II, 302.¹² III, 486.

ballad" on the subject of *The Heir of Linne* (267) is "an inexpressibly pitiable ditty."¹

Certain counterfeits, imitations, or "spurious" ballads, wholly or almost wholly the work of editors or modern writers, are included in Professor Child's collection. *Robin Hood and the Tinker* (127) is a "contemptible imitation of imitations."² Buchan's version of *Young Waters* (94) is, for the most part, "a counterfeit of the lowest description. Nevertheless it is given in an appendix; for much the same reason that thieves are photographed."³ *Young Ronald* (304) is an example of the "spurious" ballad, and the reasons for its inclusion are given at some length. "If any lover of ballads should feel his understanding insulted by the presentation of such a piece as this, I can have no quarrel with him. There is certainly much in it that is exasperating. . . . In this and not a very few other cases, I have suppressed disgust, and admitted an actually worthless and manifestly—at least in part—spurious ballad, because of a remote possibility that it might contain relics, or be a debased representative, of something genuine and better. Such was the advice of my lamented friend, Grundtvig, in more instances than those in which I have brought myself to defer to his judgment."⁴ For the same reason is included *The Laidley Worm of Spindleston Heughs*: "This composition of Mr. Lamb's—for nearly every line of it is his⁵—is not only based on popular tradition, but evidently preserves some small fragments of a popular ballad, and for this reason is given in an Appendix."⁶

¹ v, 12. Cf. also i, 35, iv, 10, 142, 401, for passages condemned as "modern."

² iii, 140.

³ ii, 342.

⁴ v, 182.

⁵ Communicated by the Rev. Mr Lamb to Hutchinson "with this harmless preamble: 'a song 500 years old, made by the old Mountain Bard, Duncan Frasier, living on Cheviot, A. D. 1270.'"

⁶ i, 308.

II.

From what has been said it is clear that, as a rule, the ballad is at its best, is most typically ballad, when its subject-matter is of purely popular origin. The *Gest* and the earliest Robin Hood ballads "are among the best of all ballads," and Robin Hood "is absolutely a creation of the popular muse. The earliest mention we have of him is as the subject of ballads."¹ "Absolutely a creation of the popular muse" would seem to imply that the ballad is not,—or that these ballads at least are not,—based either upon a formless popular tradition or upon definite prose tales. Local traditions follow the ballad, as attempts to explain it; they do not supply the story. "In places where a ballad has once been known, the story will often be remembered after the verses have been wholly or partly forgotten, and the ballad will be resolved into a prose tale, retaining, perhaps, some scraps of verse, and not infrequently taking up new matter, or blending with other traditions. Naturally enough, a ballad and an equivalent tale sometimes exist side by side."²

The existence of foreign traditional parallels is one evidence of popular origin. *The Bent Sae Brown* (71) has close resemblances with Norse ballads; "but the very homeliness of the Scottish ballad precludes any suspicion beyond tampering with tradition. The silliness and fulsome vulgarity of Buchan's versions often enough make one wince or sicken. . . . But such correspondences with foreign ballads as we witness in the present case are evidence of a genuine traditional foundation."³ Less complete, yet even more striking, are the foreign versions of the theme of *Tam Lin* (39).

¹ III, 42.

² I, 46; examples follow.

³ II, 170, n.

“This fine ballad stands by itself, and is not, as might have been expected, found in possession of any people but the Scottish. Yet it has connections, through the principal feature in the story, the retransformation of *Tam Lin*, with Greek popular tradition older than Homer.”¹ “We come surprisingly near to the principal event of the Scottish ballad in a Cretan fairy-tale [1820–1830].” And this “Cretan tale does not differ from the one repeated by Apollodorus from earlier writers a couple of thousand years ago more than two versions of a story gathered from oral tradition in these days are apt to do. Whether it has come down to our time from mouth to mouth through twenty-five centuries or more, or whether, having died out of the popular memory, it was reintroduced through literature, is a question that cannot be decided with certainty; but there will be nothing unlikely in the former supposition to those who bear in mind the tenacity of tradition among people who have never known books.”² *The Suffolk Miracle* (272) has “impressive and beautiful”³ European parallels, and therefore finds a place in Professor Child’s collection. Other debased or counterfeit or spurious ballads are present for the same reason, or because, like *Tam Lin*, they contain some purely popular or traditional feature. Certain features are expressly declared to be popular or to be common in ballads; among these are the quibbling oaths and the unbosoming oneself to an oven or stove, in *The Lord of Lorn and the False Steward* (271);⁴ the miraculous harvest in *The Carnal and the Crane* (55);⁵ the childbirth in the wood in *Leesome Brand* (15) and in *Rose the Red and White Lily* (103);⁶ the presence of three ladies, “that the youngest may be preferred to the others;” the unpardonable “offence

¹ I, 336.

² I, 337.

³ v, 59.

⁴ v, 48.

⁵ II, 7.

⁶ II, 416.

given by not asking a brother's assent to his sister's marriage" in *The Cruel Brother* (11);¹ the testament in *The Cruel Brother, Lord Randal, Edward*, etc.;² the riddles in *Riddles Wisely Expounded* (1), etc.;³ and certain stanzas in *Crow and Pie* (111).⁴ "Heroic sentiment" is a characteristic of the earlier Robin Hood ballads; in the later it is gone.⁵ It may be that in his appreciation of certain other features Professor Child is thinking not merely of their excellence but of their peculiarly popular quality as well. Thus he speaks of "the fine trait of the ringing of the bells without men's hands, and the reading of the books without man's tongue,"⁶ in *Sir Hugh* (155); and thinks that "perhaps the original conception [of *The Twa Sisters* (10)] was the simple and beautiful one which we find in English B and both the Icelandic ballads, that the king's harper, or the girl's lover, takes three locks of her yellow hair to string his harp with."⁷

The ballad does not always go to ancient tradition, or draw upon the stock of popular themes and motives; occasionally, in more modern times, it tells the story of some actual occurrence; it is based on fact. But the balladist feels himself under no obligation of loyalty to the fact. "A strict accordance with history should not be expected, and indeed would be almost a ground of suspicion [“or a pure accident”]. Ballad singers and their hearers would be as indifferent to the facts as the readers of ballads are now; it is only editors who feel bound to look closely into such matters."⁸ In *Johnie Armstrong* (169) "the ballads treat facts with the customary freedom and improve upon them greatly."⁹ *Bonny John Seton* (198) "is accurate as to the date, not commonly a good sign for such things."¹⁰ "A ballad

¹ I, 142.

² Examples, I, 143.

³ I, 1.

⁴ II, 478.

⁵ III, 159.

⁶ III, 235.

⁷ I, 121.

⁸ II, 19.

⁹ III, 366.

¹⁰ IV, 51.

taken down some four hundred years after the event will be apt to retain very little of sober history.”¹ Yet, in the case of *The Hunting of the Cheviot* (162), at least, “the ballad can scarcely be a deliberate fiction. The singer is not a critical historian, but he supposes himself to be dealing with facts; he may be partial to his countrymen, but he has no doubt that he is treating of a real event.”² Part of *The Earl of Westmoreland* (177) “has an historical substratum, though details are incorrect.”³ In *Northumberland Betrayed by Douglas* (176) “the ballad-minstrel acquaints us with circumstances concerning the surrender of Northumberland which are not known to any of the historians.”⁴ Local tradition would seem to be even less authentic than the ballad; “in such cases” as *The Coble o Cargill* (242) it “seldom means more than a theory which people have formed to explain a preexisting ballad.”⁵

We have already seen how a ballad derived from print tends to revert to the popular form; the same tendency is evident in the ballad derived from a romance. Of *Gude Wallace* (157) “Blind Harry’s Wallace . . . is clearly the source.” “But the portions of Blind Harry’s poem out of which these ballads were made were perhaps themselves composed from older ballads, and the restitution of the lyrical form may have given us something not altogether unlike what was sung in the fifteenth, or even the fourteenth, century.”⁶ *Thomas Rymer* (37) is derived from the romance, yet it is “an entirely popular ballad as to style.”⁷ These are the only cases where Professor Child admits without question the derivation of a ballad from a romance; in other cases, where ballad and romance tell the same story, he insists that the possibility of the priority of the ballad must

¹ III, 317.

² III, 304.

³ III, 417.

⁴ III, 410,

⁵ IV, 359.

⁶ III, 265 f.

⁷ I, 320.

be considered. Thus the ballad of *Hind Horn* (17) has close affinity with the later English romance, but no filiation. "And were filiation to be accepted, there would remain the question of priority. It is often assumed, without a misgiving, that oral tradition must needs be younger than anything that was committed to writing some centuries ago; but this requires in each case to be made out; there is certainly no antecedent probability of that kind."¹ *Fair Annie* (62) is not derived from the lay; they "have a common source, which lies further back, and too far for us to find."² In *Gil Brenton* (5) "the artifice of substituting waiting-woman for bride has been thought to be derived from the romance of *Tristan*. . . . Grundtvig truly remarks that a borrowing by the romance from the popular ballad is as probable a supposition as the converse."³ The ballad does sometimes go to the romance for details. Thus, in *The Earl of Westmoreland* (177) "what follows [stanza 15] is pure fancy work, or rather an imitation of stale old romance."⁴ *The Kitchie-Boy* (252) is a modern adaptation of *King Horn*, but, "in the particular of the hero's having his choice of two women, it is more like the *gest* of 'King Horn,' or 'Horn Childe and Maiden Rimnild;'" but an independent invention of the Spanish lady is not beyond the humble ability of the composer of 'The Kitchie-Boy.'"⁵ In the "worthless and manifestly—at least in part—spurious ballad" of *Young Ronald* (304), "the nicking with nay and the giant are borrowed from romances."⁶ Though the *Gest*, finally, "as to all important considerations, is eminently original, absolutely so as to the conception of Robin Hood, some traits and incidents, as might be expected, are taken from what we may call the general stock of mediæval

¹ I, 193.² II, 67.³ I, 67.⁴ III, 417.⁵ IV, 401.⁶ V, 182.

fiction.”¹ Thus “Robin Hood will not dine until he has some guest that can pay handsomely for his entertainment. . . . This habit of Robin’s seems to be a humorous imitation of King Arthur, who in numerous romances will not dine till some adventure presents itself.”²

Not only from ancient tradition, from fact, from romance or the sources of romance may the ballad derive its subject-matter; it may also turn back upon itself, and as late ballads counterfeit or imitate the style of earlier ones, so late ballads go to earlier ones for their subject-matter as well. Thus *The Battle of Otterburn* (161) “is likely to have been modernized from . . . a predecessor.”³ Part of *The King’s Disguise, and Friendship with Robin Hood* (151) “is a loose paraphrase, with omissions, of the seventh and eighth fits of the Gest.”⁴ *The Brown Girl* (295) “recalls ‘Lord Thomas and Fair Annet,’ ‘Sweet William’s Ghost,’ ‘Clerk Saunders,’ ‘The Unquiet Grave,’ ‘Bonny Barbara Allen,’ and has something of all of them. . . . Still it is not deliberately and mechanically patched together (as are some pieces in Part VIII), and in the point of the proud and unrelenting character of the Brown Girl it is original.”⁵ “Deliberately and mechanically put together” were the pieces of Part VIII which follow. *Auld Matrons* (249) “was made by someone who had acquaintance with the first fit of ‘Adam Bell.’ The anonymous ‘old wife’ becomes ‘auld Matrons;’ Inglewood, Ringlewood. The conclusion is in imitation of the rescues in Robin Hood ballads.”⁶ *Henry Martyn* (250) “must have sprung from the ashes of ‘Andrew Barton,’ of which name Henry Martyn would be no extraordinary corruption.”⁷ *The Kitchie-Boy* (252) is “a modern ‘adaptation’ of ‘King Horn’ . . . from which

¹ III, 49 f.

² III, 51.

³ III, 293.

⁴ III, 220.

⁵ v, 166.

⁶ IV, 391.

⁷ IV, 393.

A 33, 34, B 47, D 7, 8, are taken outright.”¹ The first half of *Willie's Fatal Visit* (255) “is a medley of ‘Sweet William's Ghost,’ ‘Clerk Saunders,’ and ‘The Grey Cock,’”² Of *Broughty Wa's* (258), “Stanza 9, as it runs in b, is a reminiscence of ‘Bonny Baby Livingston,’ and 13 recalls ‘Child Waters,’ or ‘The Knight and the Shepherd's Daughter.’”³ A large part of *The New-Slain Knight* (263) “is imitated or taken outright from very well known ballads.”⁴ Like some of these later ballads the *Gest of Robyn Hode* goes back to earlier ballads for its subject-matter. “The Gest is a popular epic, composed from several ballads by a poet of a thoroughly congenial spirit. No one of the ballads from which it was made up is extant in a separate shape, and some portions of the story may have been of the compiler's own invention. The decoying of the sheriff into the wood, stanzas 181–204, is of the same derivation as the last part of *Robin Hood and the Potter*, No 121, *Little John and Robin Hood exchanging parts*; the conclusion, 451–56, is of the same source as *Robin Hood's Death*, No 120.”⁵ Some of the Middle-English forms “may be relics of the ballads from which this little epic was made up; or the whole poem may have been put together as early as 1400, or before.”⁶ It is noteworthy that the *Gest* was composed *from*, not *of*, several ballads; it was not made up of unchanged ballads, “deliberately and mechanically put together.”

The motives or features characteristic of subject-matter derived from pure popular tradition have already been noted; we may now note those traits which Professor Child declares or implies to be not characteristic of such subject-matter. Extravagance would seem to be one of these: the extravagance of *Hughie Grame* (191, A, 16) “it is to be

¹ IV, 401.

⁵ III, 49.

² IV, 415.

⁶ III, 40.

³ IV, 423.

⁴ IV, 434.

hoped is a corruption.”¹ In *Mary Hamilton* (173) “there are not a few spurious passages. Among these are the extravagance of the queen’s bursting in the door, F 8; the platitude,² of menial stamp, that the child, if saved, might have been an honor to the mother, D 10, L 3, O 4,”³ Exaggeration is another non-traditional trait: “It is but the natural course of exaggeration that the shepherd, having beaten Robin Hood, should beat Little John. This is descending low enough, but we do not see the bottom of this kind of balladry here”⁴ [*Robin Hood and the Shepherd* (165)]. *Robin Hood and Queen Katherine* (145) is “a very pleasant ballad, with all the exaggeration.”⁵ The true ballad is not prosaic: in *Fause Foodrage* (89) “the king kills his successful rival on his wedding-day. According to the prosaic, not at all ballad-like, and evidently corrupted account in A, there is a rebellion of nobles four months after the marriage, and a certain False Foodrage takes it upon himself to kill the king.”⁶ The true ballad is not over-refined: in *The Braes of Yarrow* (214, C, 2) “the brothers have taken offence because their sister was not regarded as his equal by her husband, which is perhaps too much of a refinement for ballads, and may be a perversion.”⁷ The true ballad is not cynical: *The Twa Corbies* sounds “something like a cynical variation of the tender little English ballad,”⁸ and it is not printed as a ballad in Professor Child’s collection. The true ballad is not sophisticated: it was the influence of the play, Home’s *Douglas*, that gave vogue to the ballad, *Child Maurice* (83), and “the sophisticated copy passed into recitation.”⁹ The true ballad is not sentimental: in *Mary Hamilton* (173), “there are not a few spurious

¹ iv, 10.

² Cf. iii, 225.

³ iii, 381.

⁴ iii, 165.

⁵ iii, 197.

⁶ ii, 296.

⁷ iv, 161.

⁸ i, 253. Cf. also iii, 258.

⁹ ii, 263.

passages," among them, "the sentimentality of H 3, 16."¹ Jamieson published *Child Waters* (63, B a) with "the addition of three sentimental stanzas to make Burd Ellen die just as her enduring all things is to be rewarded."² The true ballad does not append a moral: a German version of *Lady Isabel and the Elf-Knight* (4) "smacks decidedly of the bänkelsänger, and has an appropriate moral at the tail."³ A certain degree of probability or naturalness is to be expected of the true ballad story: in *Jellon Grame* (90), "one day, when the boy asks why his mother does not take him home, Jellon Grame (very unnaturally) answers, I slew her, and there she lies: upon which the boy sends an arrow through him."⁴ Finally, the plot of the true ballad is not trite. In *Child Owlet* (291) "the chain of gold in the first stanza and the penknife below the bed in the fourth have a false ring, and the story is of the tritest. The ballad seems at best to be a late one, and is perhaps mere imitation."⁵

III.

It is clear that to Professor Child's mind it was necessary that the ballad should tell a story. "The word *ballad* in English signifies a narrative song, a short tale in lyric verse."⁶ Thus the English versions of *Geordie* (209) are said to be mere 'goodnights,' whereas "the Scottish ballads have a proper story, with a beginning, middle, and end, and (save one late copy), a good end, and they are most certainly . . . independent of the English."⁷ *Dugall Quin* (294) is a "little ballad, which has barely story enough to be so

¹ III, 381. ² II, 83. ³ I, 34. ⁴ II, 302. ⁵ V, 156 f.

⁶ *Universal Cyclopaedia*, "Ballad Poetry." The lyrical element is of equal importance; see p. 790, below.

⁷ IV, 126.

called.”¹ To the “English ‘ditty’ (not a traditional ballad) . . . there is very little story.”²

Necessary as the story is, however, it is seldom completely told in the ballad; something is left to the hearers’ imagination. Sometimes the close of the story is omitted: “it is not said (except in the spurious portions of E) that the lady was carried back by her husband, but this may perhaps be inferred from his hanging the gypsies. In D and K we are left uncertain as to her disposition.”³ Transitions are usually abrupt,—“abrupt even for a ballad” in *Willie’s Lady* (6) from stanza 33 to stanza 34.⁴ Jamieson, in printing *The Bonny Birdy* (82), introduced several stanzas ‘to fill up chasms.’ “But the chasms, such as they are, are easily leapt by the imagination, and Jamieson’s interpolations are mere bridges of carpenter’s work.”⁵ Of *Sir Patrick Spens* (58), “Percy’s version [A] remains, poetically, the best. It may be a fragment, but the imagination easily supplies all that may be wanting; and if more of the story, or the whole, be told in H, the half is better⁶ than the whole.”⁷ These abrupt transitions do not, then, result in incoherence, which accompanies corruption and is a sign of degeneracy. Thus *The Carnal and the Crane* (55) “had obviously been transmitted from mouth to mouth before it was fixed in its present incoherent and corrupted form by print.”⁸ *Young Bearwell* (302) is “one of not a few flimsy and unjointed ballads found in Buchan’s volumes, the like of which is hardly to be found elsewhere.”⁹ After an attempt to make the story of *The White Fisher* (264) hang together, Professor

¹ v, 165.

² iv, 192. [The Broom of Cowdenknows (217)].

³ iv, 63. [The Gypsie Laddie (200)].

⁴ I, 82.

⁵ II, 260.

⁶ Surely better as ballad. Cf. p. 796, below.

⁷ II, 18.

⁸ II, 7.

⁹ v, 178.

Child concludes: "But we need not trouble ourselves much to make these counterfeits reasonable. Those who utter them rely confidently upon our taking folly and jargon as the marks of genuineness."¹ Coherence, on the contrary, is a characteristic of the true ballad, an important phase of ballad excellence. "I am persuaded that there was an older and better copy of this ballad [*Bewick and Graham* (211)] than those which are extant. The story is so well composed, proportion is so well kept, on the whole, that it is reasonable to suppose that certain passages (as stanzas 3, 4, 50) may have suffered some injury."² Introductions, not closely connected with the ballad story, are not characteristic. "The narrator in the *Ever Green* poem reports at second hand: as he is walking, he meets a man who, upon request, tells him the beginning and the end. Both pieces have nearly the same first line. The borrowing was more probably on the part of the ballad, for a popular ballad would be likely to tell its tale without preliminaries."³

Brevity is a characteristic of the true ballad, and it may be, in this respect, profitably contrasted with Buchan's versions. Version C of *Brown Adam* (98) "has the usual marks of Buchan's copies, great length, vulgarity, and such extravagance and absurdity as are found in stanzas 23, 26, 29."⁴ "Buchan, who may generally be relied upon to produce a longer ballad than anybody else, has 'Young Waters' in thirty-nine stanzas, 'the only complete version which he had ever met.'"⁵ His version of *The Gay Goshawk* (96, G) is "vilely dilated and debased,"⁶ and that of *Jellon Grame* (90, C) "has nearly the same incidents as B, diluted and vulgarized in almost twice as many verses."⁷

The action is seldom carefully localized: the compiler of

¹ iv, 435.

² iv, 145.

³ iii, 317.

⁴ ii, 373.

⁵ ii, 342.

⁶ ii, 355.

⁷ ii, 302.

A Gest of Robyn Hode was careless of geography.¹ The New England copy of *Archie o Cawfield* (188, F) "naturally enough, names no places." "The route in C is not described² there is no reason, if they start from Cafield (see 23), why they should cross the Annan, the town being on the eastern side. All difficulties are escaped in D by giving no names."² The attention given to the setting in some of the Robin Hood ballads is, then, exceptional. Of *Robin Hood and the Monk* (119), "the landscape background of the first two stanzas has often been praised, and its beauty will never pall. It may be called landscape or prelude, for both eyes and ears are addressed, and several others of these woodland ballads have a like symphony or setting: Adam Bell, Robin Hood and the Potter, Guy of Gisborne, even the much later ballad of The Noble Fisherman. It is to be observed that the story of the outlaw Fulk Fitz Warine, which has other traits in common with Robin Hood ballads, begins somewhat after the same fashion."³

In dealing with the supernatural the way of the true ballad is to omit description or explanation. In *James Harris* (243), "to explain the eery personality and proceedings of the ship-master, E—G, with a sort of vulgar rationalism, turn him into the devil. . . . D (probably by the fortunate accident of being a fragment) leaves us to put our own construction upon the weird seaman; and, though it retains the homely ship-carpenter, is on the whole the most satisfactory of all the versions."⁴ In *Johnie Scot* (99) "the champion is described in A 31 as a gurious (grugous, gruious?) ghost; in H 27 as a greecy (frightful) ghost; in L 18 he is a fearsome sight, with three women's spans between his brows and three yards between his shoulders; in the Abbotsford copy of A, 29, 30, a grisly sight, with a

¹ III, 51.

² III, 486.

³ III, 95.

⁴ IV, 362.

span between his eyes, between his shoulders three and three, and Johnie scarcely reaching his knee. These points are probably taken from another and later ballad, which is perhaps an imitation, and might almost be called a parody, of Johnie Soot.”¹ Ghosts, though not thought sufficiently strange to demand special treatment, should, nevertheless, “have a fair reason for walking. . . . In popular fictions, the motive for their leaving the grave is to ask back plighted troth, to be relieved from the inconveniences caused by the excessive grief of the living, to put a stop to the abuse of children by stepmothers, to repair an injustice done in the flesh, to fulfil a promise; at the least, to announce the visitant’s death.”²

Turning now from technique,—from treatment of plot, of setting, of the supernatural,—to style in the narrower sense, we find that the comments are again largely in the way of pointing out flaws, or traits which are not characteristic of the true ballad, and which are due to the peculiar conditions of ballad transmission. From such negative comments may be inferred, again, the stylistic marks of the true ballad. Thus, in the first place, ballad style is artless and homely. In *Andrew Lammie* (233):

Her bloom was like the springing flower
That hails the rosy morning,
With innocence and graceful mein
Her beauteous form adorning.

and

‘No kind of vice eer staind my life,
Or hurt my virgin honour ;
My youthful heart was won by love,
But death will me exoner’ (C, 2, 42).

are “not homely enough.”³ Moreover,

¹ II, 378.

² V, 59.

³ IV, 301, n.

'At Fyvie's yetts there grows a flower,
 It grows baith braid and bonny ;
 There's a daisie in the midst o it,
 And it's ca'd by Andrew Lammie' (A, 1.).

"the mystical verses with which A and B begin are also not quite artless."¹ The ninth stanza of *The New-Slain Knight* (263) "is pretty, but not quite artless."² In the true ballad the conceit is out of place. Scott's version (C) of *Thomas Rymer* (37) closes with two satirical stanzas not popular in style. "'The repugnance of Thomas to be debarred the use of falsehood when he should find it convenient,' may have, as Scott says, 'a comic effect,' but is, for a ballad, a miserable conceit."³ In *The Mother's Malison* (216), A 8¹⁻², C 10¹⁻²,

Make me your wrack as I come back,
 But spare me as I go,

the conceit (from Martial) "does not overwell suit a popular ballad."⁴ The literary manner is thus to be contrasted with the popular. In *Edward* (13) "the word 'brand,' in the first stanza, is possibly more literary than popular; further than this the language is entirely fit."⁵ Of *Earl Brand* (7) "A a has suffered less from literary revision than A c."⁶ This revision may be illustrated by the following stanza :

To a maiden true he'll give his hand,
 To the king's daughter o fair England,
 To a prize that was won by a slain brother's hand,

which c substitutes for a 32 :

This has not been the death o ane,
 But it's been that of fair seventeen.

Of *The Fair Flower of Northumberland* (9) "E, a traditional

¹ iv, 301, n.

² iv, 434.

³ i, 320, n.

⁴ iv, 186.

⁵ i, 167.

⁶ i, 88.

version from the English border, has unfortunately been improved by some literary pen.”¹ These improvements consist in part of descriptions of the lady’s states of mind ;² for example :

To think of the prisoner her heart was sore,
Her love it was much but her pity was more.

The words that he said on her fond heart smote,
She knew not in sooth if she lived or not.

She looked to his face, and it kythed so unkind
That her fast coming tears soon rendered her blind.

(Sts. 3, 9, 10.)

Jamie Telfer (190) “was retouched for the Border Minstrelsy, nobody can say how much. The 36th stanza is in Hardy-knute style.”³

Of *Hughie Gramme* (191), B, 3, 8, “are obviously, as Cromeck says, the work of Burns, and the same is true of 10³⁻⁴. ”⁴ *The Famous Flower of Serving-Men* (106), an “English broadside, which may be reasonably believed to be formed upon a predecessor in the popular style,⁵ was given in Percy’s *Reliques*, . . . , ‘from a written copy containing some improvements (perhaps modern ones).’ These improvements are execrable in style and in matter, so far as there is new matter, but not in so glaring contrast with the groundwork as literary emendations of traditional ballads.”⁶ Such contrast is found in the “hack-rhymester lines” in *Bewick and Graham* (211, 7³, 19²), which are “not up to the mark of the general style.”⁷ Similarly, *King Henry* (32) “as pub-

¹ I, 112. ² [The true ballad has little to say of mental states.]

³ IV, 5. The stanza reads :

But he’s taen aff his gude steel cap,
And thrice he’s waved it in the air ;
The Dinlay snaw was neer mair white
Nor the lyart locks of Harden’s hair.

⁴ IV, 10.

⁵ II, 430.

⁶ II, 428.

⁷ IV, 145.

lished by Jamieson is increased by interpolation to thirty-four stanzas [from twenty]. ‘The interpolations will be found enclosed in brackets,’ but a painful contrast of style of itself distinguishes them.”¹ Editorial changes are, however, in some cases confined to slight verbal variations, where the contrast is less evident or painful.²

Yet, in spite of its artless, homely, and non-literary style, the ballad is not without conventions of its own. Most striking of these is the use of “commonplaces” or passages which recur in many ballads, like:

When bells were rung and mass was sung,
And a’ men bound to bed;

or,

O whan he came to broken briggs
He bent his bow and swam,
An whan he came to the green grass growin
He slackd his shoone and ran.³

Another convention is the complete repetition of the message by the messenger. Thus in *Fair Mary of Wallington* (91, A) “the stanza which should convey part of the message is wanting, but may be confidently supplied from the errand-boy’s repetition.”⁴ Another form of repetition occurs in the narration of similar incidents by different ballads. “There is a general resemblance between the rescue of Robin Hood in stanzas 61–81 and that of William of Cloudesly in Adam Bell, 56–94, and the precaution suggested by Much in the eighth stanza corresponds to the warning given by Adam in the eighth stanza of the other ballad. There is a verbal agreement in stanzas 71 of the first and 66 of the second. Such agreements or repetitions are numerous in the Robin Hood ballads, and in other traditional ballads, where similar situations occur.”⁵

¹ I, 297.

² Cf. II, 83, 317; IV, 39.

³ See the *Index of Matters and Literature*, V, 474 f.

⁴ II, 309, n.

⁵ III, 96.

In the course of degeneration, ballads retain, but distort, the commonplace. Thus in *Lord Thomas and Lady Margaret* (261) "B 14^{3,4}" is a commonplace, which, in inferior traditional ballads, is often, as here, an out-of-place. B 15, 16 is another commonplace, of the silly sort."¹ "Hacknied commonplaces" occur in *Auld Matrons* (249), stanzas 2-5; "frippery commonplaces," in *The White Fisher* (264), stanzas 2, 7, 8, 12.²

Turning now to the emotional qualities of ballad style, we find that the ghost ballad, in spite (or perhaps because) of the absence of special treatment noted above, is, at its best, "impressive." The scene at the grave in *Sweet William's Ghost* (77 C 11-13) "may be judged grotesque, but is not trivial or unimpressive. These verses may be supposed not to have belonged to the earliest form of the ballad, and one does not miss them from A, but they cannot be an accretion of modern date."⁴ In *The Wife of Usher's Well* (79) "there is no indication that the sons come back to forbid obstinate grief, as the dead often do. But supplying a motive would add nothing to the impressiveness of these verses. Nothing that we have is more profoundly affecting."⁵ *The Suffolk Miracle* (272) is to be contrasted with the continental versions, "one of the most remarkable tales and one of the most impressive and beautiful ballads of the European continent."⁶ *Bewick and Graham* (211), in spite of certain defects, "is a fine-spirited ballad as it stands, and very infectious."⁷ *Walter Lesly* (296) is "a late, but life-like and spirited ballad."⁸ *The Wee Wee Man* (38) is an "extremely airy and sparkling little ballad."⁹ *Andrew Lammie* (233) "is a homely ditty, but the gentleness and fidelity of Annie under the brutal behavior of her family are genuinely pathetic, and justify the remarkable popularity

¹ IV, 426.

² IV, 391.

³ IV, 435.

⁴ II, 227.

⁵ II, 238.

⁶ V, 59.

⁷ IV, 145.

⁸ V, 168.

⁹ I, 329.

which the ballad has enjoyed in the north of Scotland.”¹ Contrasted with the cynical *Twa Corbies* of Scott’s *Minstrelsy* is *The Three Ravens* (26), a “tender little English ballad.”² In the *Gest*: “Nothing was ever more felicitously told, even in the best *dit* or *fabliau*, than the ‘process’ of Our Lady’s repaying the money which had been lent on her security. Robin’s slyly significant welcome to the monk upon learning that he is of Saint Mary Abbey, his professed anxiety that Our Lady is wroth with him because she has not sent him his pay, John’s comfortable suggestion that perhaps the monk has brought it, Robin’s incidental explanation of the little business in which the Virgin was a party, and request to see the silver in case the monk has come upon her affair, are beautiful touches of humor, and so delicate that it is all but brutal to point them out.”³ The tales which are cited as parallels to *Queen Eleanor’s Confession* (156) all “have the cynical Oriental character, and, to a healthy taste, are far surpassed by the innocuous humor of the English ballad.”⁴ While we need not question the substantial genuineness of *Fause Foodrage* (89), “we must admit that the form in which we have received it is an enfeebled one, without much flavor or color.”⁵ *The Suffolk Miracle* (272) preserves the story only in a “blurred, enfeebled, and disfigured shape.”⁶ Version B of the *Cheviot* (162) is “very seriously enfeebled.”⁷

The lyrical quality,—the fact that the ballad was made to be sung,—must not be lost sight of. “Fair Annie’s fortunes have not only been charmingly sung, as here [in the ballad of *Fair Annie* (62)]; they have also been exquisitely told in a favorite lay of Marie de France.”⁸ The superior lyrical quality of *The Bonny Birdy* (82) “makes up for its inferiority [to *Little Musgrave* (81)] as a story, so that on

¹ IV, 301.

² I, 253.

³ III, 53.

⁴ III, 258.

⁵ II, 296.

⁶ V, 59.

⁷ III, 305.

⁸ II, 67.

the whole it cannot be prized much lower than the noble English ballad.”¹ Thus lyrical quality is to be regarded as no less significant than plot as a trait of the true ballad. *The Queen of Elfan’s Nourice* (40), “after the nature of the best popular ballad, forces you to chant and will not be read.”² Even *The Jolly Pindar of Wakefield* (124) “is thoroughly lyrical, . . . and was pretty well sung to pieces before it ever was printed.”³ “It is not . . . always easy to say whether an isolated stanza belonged to a ballad or a song ;”⁴ and Professor Child speaks even of the whole of *Bessy Bell and Mary Gray* (201) as “this little ballad, or song.”⁵ Of *Lord Lovel* (75) he says: “It can scarcely be too often repeated that such ballads as this were meant only to be sung, not at all to be recited. . . . ‘Lord Lovel’ is especially one of those which, for their due effect, require the support of a melody, and almost equally the comment of a burden. No burden is preserved in the case of ‘Lord Lovel,’ but we are not to infer that there never was one. The burden, which is at least as important as the instrumental accompaniment of modern songs, sometimes, in these little tragedies, foreshadows calamity from the outset, sometimes . . . is a cheerful-sounding formula, which in the upshot enhances by contrast the gloom of the conclusion. ‘A simple but life-like story, supported by the burden and the air, these are the means by which such old romances seek to produce an impression.’”⁶ *The Elfin Knight* (2 A) “is the only example, so far as I remember, which our ballads afford of a burden of this kind, one that is of greater extent than the stanza with which it was sung, though this kind of burden seems to have been common enough with old songs and carols.”⁷

¹ II, 260.

² I, 358.

³ III, 129.

⁴ V, 201.

⁵ IV, 75.

⁶ II, 204, n.

⁷ I, 7. See the foot-note for Professor Child’s longest discussion of the burden.

IV.

The English and Scottish Popular Ballads of 1882–1898 has naturally superseded the *English and Scottish Ballads* of 1857–1859, and Professor Child himself shared the general tendency to underestimate the real value of the earlier collection. It was of course made on a different plan; its limits were not so clearly defined, and it did not attempt to give every version of every known ballad. Many of the sources, moreover, were not yet open. One is, then, surprised to find that, of the three hundred and five ballads printed in the later collection, only ninety are new; and these are, for the most part, unimportant additions to the body of ballad literature. They are distributed as follows: 15 in volume I, 16 in II, 11 in III, 25 in IV, 23 in V. Thus 59 of the 90 occur in the last three volumes; of these there is not one of first importance. Of the remaining 31 not more than 10 can be regarded as really valuable additions, though such an estimate must of necessity be based more or less upon personal impression. Some of these were already accessible, in Buchan's versions, or elsewhere: *Willie's Lyke-Wake* (25), *Lizzie Wan* (51), *The King's Dochter Lady Jean* (52), *Brown Robyn's Confession* (57), *Fair Mary of Waltington* (91). These, doubtless, were omitted because of the nature of their subject-matter; it was only in the later collection that Professor Child "had no discretion."¹ Other important ballads were not yet accessible, or not yet discovered: *St. Stephen and Herod* (22), *The Laily Worm and the Machrel of the Sea* (36), *The Queen of Elfan's Nourice* (40), *The Unquiet Grave* (78), *The Great Silkie of Sule Skerry* (113). Of the ten, only four are included in Professor Gummere's collection. The main addition of the later collection is thus rather in the way of

¹ *Sheath and Knife* (16), also, was accessible but omitted.

new versions of important ballads, or of more authentic versions based directly upon the manuscripts ; in the citation of a larger number of foreign parallels ; and, generally, in the matter contained in the introductions.

The *Ballads* contained 115 pieces which do not appear in the later collection. The nature of such material, since it is excluded from the "complete" *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, is significant as throwing some additional light upon Professor Child's conception. In many cases the reason for exclusion is made clear by Professor Child himself, in comments in the earlier or in the later collection. Of the whole group of lays and romances contained in Book I of the *Ballads*, he says : "Some of the longer pieces in this book are not of the nature of ballads, and require an apology. They were admitted before the limits of the work had been determined with exactness."¹ If such pieces as these do not fulfil the lyrical requirement of the true ballad, others cannot fulfil the requirement of plot, and the songs of the *Ballads*, like *A Lyke Wake Dirge*, *Fair Helen of Kirconnel*, or *The Lowlands of Holland*² find no place in the later collection. The *Ballads* contains also translations from the Danish, and the original and translation of a modern Greek parallel of the *Lenore* story ; these are naturally not included in *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*.

The later collection is much more chary of the admission of broadsides or sheet-ballads : in many cases they are relegated to introductions or appendices ; in many more, omitted.

¹ *Ballads*, I, xi, n. "Certain short romances which formerly stood in the First Book, have been dropped from this second Edition [1860], in order to give the collection a homogeneous character." *Ballads* [1860], I, xii.

² "A song," II, 317. (Where merely volume and page are given the reference is still to the later collection ; references to the earlier are preceded by the word *Ballads*.)

William Guiseman is cited merely, under *Brown Robin's Confession* (57), as "a copy, improved by tradition, of the 'lament' in 'William Grismond's Downfal,' a broadside of 1650."¹ *The Lament of the Border Widow*, which occurs in Book VI of the *Ballads*, "shows broader traces of the sheet-ballad," and is quoted in the introduction to No 106 for "those who are interested in such random inventions (as, under pardon, they must be called)."² Of *The Lady Isabella's Tragedy* Professor Child says in the later collection: "Though perhaps absolutely the silliest ballad that ever was made, and very far from silly sooth, the broadside was traditionally propagated in Scotland without so much change as is usual in such cases."³ Even in the *Ballads* one finds this comment: "The three following pieces [*The Spanish Virgin*, *Lady Isabella's Tragedy*, *The Cruel Black*] are here inserted merely as specimens of a class of tales, horrible in their incidents but feeble in their execution, of which whole dreary volumes were printed and read about two centuries ago. They were all of them, probably, founded on Italian novels."⁴ Although the *Ballads* includes *Macpherson's Rant*, it is declared "worthy of a hangman's pen."⁵ A number of tales which employ a highly artificial stanza, such as *The Fray of Suport*, *The Raid of the Reidswire*, or *The Flemish Insurrection*, do not find their way into the later collection.

Traces of the modern editor or author become less common in the later collection. Versions "modernized and completed by Percy" (Book I, Nos. 1 b and 5 b) are excluded. The cynical *Twa Corbies* appears only in the introduction to *The Three Ravens*; and Motherwell's edition, declared already in the *Ballads* to be a "modernized version,"⁶ does not appear at all. Motherwell's *Bonnie*

¹ II, 16.

² II, 429.

³ V, 34, n.

⁴ *Ballads*, III, 360.

⁵ *Ballads*, VI, 263.

⁶ *Ballads*, III, 61.

George Campbell suffers a like fate, and this, we infer, because "Motherwell made up his 'Bonnie George Campbell' from B, C, D."¹ As, no doubt, not merely modernized but modern, *Sir Roland* is excluded. "This fragment, Motherwell tells us, was communicated to him by an ingenious friend, who remembered having heard it sung in his youth. He does not vouch for its antiquity, and we have little or no hesitation in pronouncing it a modern composition."² Similarly, *Lady Anne* "is on the face of it a modern composition, with extensive variations, on the theme of the popular ballad."³ It is printed in the appendix to No 20. *Earl Richard* is "an entirely modern composition, excepting only the twenty lines of Herd's fragment."⁴ Of *Auld Maitland* Professor Child says: "Notwithstanding the authority of Scott and Leyden, I am inclined to agree with Mr Aytoun, that this ballad is a modern imitation, or if not that, a comparatively recent composition. It is with reluctance that I make for it the room it requires."⁵ The essential anonymity of the ballad, in Professor Child's final conception, naturally excludes pieces like Henryson's *Robene and Makyne* and *The Bludy Serk*, which had found their way into the *Ballads*.⁶

There are but few instances of definite praise, as ballads, of pieces included in the earlier collection and excluded from the later. *The Children in the Wood* is said to be "perhaps the most popular of all English ballads. Its merit is attested by the favor it has enjoyed with so many generations, and was vindicated to a cold and artificial age by the kindly pen of Addison."⁷ We must not forget,

¹ iv, 142. ² *Ballads*, i, 341. ³ i, 218, n. ⁴ *Ballads*, iii, 293.

⁵ *Ballads*, vi, 220. Cf. Mr Andrew Lang's plea for *Auld Maitland*, *Folk-Lore*, xiii, 191 ff.

⁶ See also the comments on the Rev. Mr Lamb's *Laidley Worm of Spindleston Heugh*, *Ballads*, i, 386, and cf. p. 772, above.

⁷ *Ballads*, iii, 128.

however, that Professor Child was fifty years nearer the kindly pen of Addison. The cold and artificial age, moreover, was also sentimental and moral; and why, with it, this ballad was so popular, a single stanza will show:

You that executors be made,
 And overseers eke
 Of children that be fatherless,
 And infants mild and meek;
 Take you example by this thing,
 And yield to each his right,
 Lest God with such like miserye
 Your wicked minds requite (vv. 153 ff.).

The Blind Beggar's Daughter of Bednall's Green is said to be printed from a modern broadside, yet it is characterized as "this favorite popular ballad."¹ *The Nutbrowne Maid* is "this matchless poem," "this beautiful old ballad."² Yet, clearly, it is not a popular ballad at all.

On the whole, it is not difficult to see why the 115 ballads are excluded from the later collection; and one gets the impression that, had Professor Child chosen to enforce the conception of the ballad which he already had in mind, most of them would have been excluded from the earlier collection as well. This impression is deepened by an examination of the comments scattered through the *Ballads*.

He already regarded the ballad as inimitable:³ "The exclusion of the 'Imitations' . . . may possibly excite the regret of a few. . . . Whatever may be the merit of the productions in question, they are never less likely to obtain credit for it, than when they are brought into comparison with their professed models."⁴ Again, *Sir Patrick Spence*, "if not ancient, has been always accepted as such by the most skilful judges, and is a solitary instance of a successful

¹ *Ballads*, iv, 161.

² *Ballads*, iv, 143 f.

³ Cf. p. 757, above.

⁴ *Ballads*, v, iv.

imitation, in manner and spirit, of the best specimens of authentic minstrelsy.”¹

Professor Child had already fallen foul of the editors, and their alterations and interpolations.² It is interesting to see how, in many cases, he anticipated the corrections and comments made possible, for the later collection, by access to the manuscripts. Of *The Child of Elle* he says: “So extensive are Percy’s alterations and additions, that the reader will have no slight difficulty in detecting the few traces that are left of the genuine composition.”³ Compare: “So much of Percy’s ‘Child of Elle’ as was genuine, which, upon the printing of his manuscript, turned out to be one fifth.”⁴ Again, Percy acknowledges interpolations, which “might with some confidence be pointed out. Among them are certainly most, if not all, of the last twelve stanzas of the Second Part, which include the catastrophe to the story.”⁵ In Percy, he says in the later collection, *Sir Cawline* “is extended to nearly twice the amount of what is found in the manuscript, and a tragical turn is forced upon the story.”⁶ Again: “We have given *Gil Morrice* as it stands in the *Reliques* (iii. 132,) degrading to the margin those stanzas which are undoubtedly spurious.”⁷ The stanzas thus degraded turned out to be actually spurious.⁸ Condemnation of Buchan is scattered throughout the *Ballads*. Thus: “Some resolution has been exercised, and much disgust suppressed, in retaining certain pieces from Buchan’s collections, so strong is the suspicion that, after having been procured from very inferior sources, they were tampered with by the editor.”⁹ Again: “One uncommonly tasteless stanza [41, A, 53], the interpolation of some nursery-maid,”¹⁰

¹ *Ballads*, III, 148–149.

² Cf. p. 767, above.

³ *Ballads*, III, 225.

⁴ I, 88.

⁵ *Ballads*, III, 173.

⁶ II, 56.

⁷ *Ballads*, II, 30.

⁸ II, 275.

⁹ *Ballads*, I, ix, n.

¹⁰ Cf. p. 762, above.

is here omitted. Too many of Buchan's ballads have suffered in this way, and have become both prolix and vulgar."¹ Even in the *Ballads* Professor Child placed "no confidence in any of Allan Cunningham's *souvenirs* of Scottish song,"² and his early suspicions³ of the character of Cunningham's version of Gil Brenton are confirmed in the later collection.⁴ *King Henry*, printed in the earlier collection "without the editor's [Jamieson's] interpolations,"⁵ appears in the same form in the later, except that stanza 14 is printed in small type, as not being in the Jamieson-Brown MS. Again, in *The Bonny Birdy*, "the lines supplied by Jamieson have been omitted."⁶ There is an interesting comment on these lines in the later collection.⁷

Professor Child was already aware that change of nationality was accompanied by change of the scene of action.⁸ He quoted Scott's account of the locality of *The Douglas Tragedy* [= *Earl Brand* (7, B)], and added: "After so circumstantial a description of the scene, . . . the reader may be amused to see the same story told in various Scandinavian ballads, with a no less plausible resemblance to actual history. This, as has already been pointed out under *Guy of Warwick* and *Kempion*,⁹ is an ordinary occurrence in the transmission of legends."¹⁰

He noted, too, the tendency of ballads to combine: "The natural desire of men to hear more of characters in whom they have become strongly interested, has frequently stimu-

¹ *Ballads*, I, 306 n. ² *Ballads*, II, 220. ³ *Ballads*, I, 270.

⁴ See I, 62, and, for the omitted couplets, I, 80-81.

⁵ *Ballads*, I, 265. ⁶ *Ballads*, II, 22.

⁷ II, 260. See, also, the comments on Jamieson's *Child Rowland and Burd Ellen*, *Ballads*, I, 416, and *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, V, 201, n.

⁸ Cf. p. 769, above. ⁹ *Ballads*, I, 256. ¹⁰ *Ballads*, II, 115.

lated the attempt to continue successful fictions.”¹ *Sweet William's Ghost* is often made the sequel to other ballads.²

So far as subject-matter is concerned, we find in the *Ballads* the same conception of the relation of ballad and fact. *Jane Shore* “adheres to matter of fact with a fidelity very uncommon,”³ and this is, perhaps, one reason why it does not find a place in the later collection.⁴ We may contrast, on the other hand, the two statements in regard to the relation of *Hind Horn* and the romance: “Metrical romances . . . are known in many cases to have been adapted for the entertainment of humbler hearers, by abridgment in the form of ballads.” He regards *Hind Horn* as a case of this sort.⁵

Style and plot, finally, are a test of genuineness: “I cannot assent to the praise bestowed by Scott on *The Outlaw Murray*. The story lacks point and the style is affected—not that of the unconscious poet of the real *traditional* ballad.”⁶ Though there without comment, it is placed at the very end of the later collection.

From a comment like this it is obvious that Professor Child already had in mind the conception of “a real *traditional* ballad,” a “specimen of authentic minstrelsy.”⁷ Although he admitted to the earlier collection lays, romances, songs, broadsides and sheet-ballads, as well as modern or modernized compositions, yet he was aware that all these differed from the true ballad. This true ballad, he conceived, was inimitable, in matter and manner. In transmission it might suffer, from the invention of a nursery-maid, from Buchan's beggar, from a “hangman's pen,” from the modern editors. It drew its subject-matter from fact (to which it

¹ *Ballads*, II, 64.

² *Ballads*, II, 45.

³ *Ballads*, VII, 194.

⁴ Cf. the comment on *The Hunting of the Cheviot*, *Ballads*, VII, 25.

⁵ *Ballads*, IV, 17. For the later comment, see p. 777, above.

⁶ *Ballads*, VI, 22.

⁷ *Ballads*, III, 148-149.

was not loyal), from romances, from other ballads. In quality the subject-matter was not "horrible." In style the true ballad was not feeble in execution, not prolix and vulgar, and not affected. The earlier conception was not as complete as the later, and it was by no means so rigorously enforced. In regard to specific compositions, there was, as is to be expected, some change of opinion. But the significant fact is that for at least forty years Professor Child retained without essential change his conception of the traditional ballad as a distinct literary type.

V.

We may now bring together the passages in which Professor Child declared certain ballads to be of the true "popular" or "traditional" type. The fewness of such passages is at first surprising, yet it clearly formed no part of a set purpose to include in his introductions estimates of this kind, and such "appreciations" seem to have been either spontaneous,—springing, as in the case of *Johnie Cock*, from his delight in the ballad with which he was concerned,—or intended, as in the case of *Edward*, as answer to his predecessors' doubts of authenticity. On ballads like *Lord Randal*, *Babylon*, *Hind Horn*, *Clerk Saunders*, *Fair Margaret and Sweet William*, there is no such comment. It would seem, no doubt, in such cases obviously unnecessary. Nevertheless the list is fairly representative. We have examples of the Domestic Ballad,—tragic, in *Earl Brand* (7), *Edward* (13), *Old Robin of Portingale* (80), *Little Musgrave* (81), *The Bonny Birdy* (82); not tragic, in *Child Waters* (63), *Young Beichan* (53), *Queen Eleanor's Confession* (156): we have examples of the Supernatural Ballad,—transformation, in *The Laily Worm and the Machrel of the Sea* (36); fairy, in *Thomas Rymer* (37); ghost, in *The Wife*

of *Usher's Well* (79) : we have examples of the Border Ballad in *Captain Car* (178 F) and *Jock o the Side* (187) : of the Outlaw Ballad in *Johnie Cock* (114), the Robin Hood ballads, 117-121 : of the Heroic Ballad in *King Estmere* (60), *Sir Aldingar* (59), *Sir Patrick Spens* (58 A).

Johnie Cock (114) : "This precious specimen of the unspoiled traditional ballad." III, 1.

Edward (13) : "The word 'brand,' in the first stanza, is possibly more literary than popular ; further than this the language is entirely fit. The affectedly antique spelling in Percy's copy has given rise to vague suspicions concerning the authenticity of the ballad, or of the language : but as spelling will not make an old ballad, so it will not unmake one. We have, but do not need, the later traditional copy to prove the other genuine. 'Edward' is not only unimpeachable, but has ever been regarded as one of the noblest and most sterling specimens of the popular ballad." I, 167.

The Laily Worm and the Machrel of the Sea (36) : "Somewhat mutilated, and also defaced, though it be, this ballad has certainly never been retouched by a pen, but is pure tradition. It has the first stanza in common with 'Kemp Owyne,' and shares more than that with 'Allison Gross.' But it is independent of 'Allison Gross,' and has a far more original sound." I, 315.

Earl Brand (7) "has preserved most of the incidents of a very ancient story with a faithfulness unequalled by any ballad that has been recovered from English oral tradition." I, 88.

The Wife of Usher's Well (79) : "A motive for the return of the wife's three sons is not found in the fragments which remain to us. . . . But supplying a motive would add nothing to the impressiveness of these verses. Nothing that we have is more profoundly affecting." II, 238.

Thomas Rymer (37) : "B has been corrupted here and there, but only by tradition." I, 317.

"The fairy adventures of Thomas and of Ogier have the essential points in common, and even the particular trait that the fairy is taken to be the Virgin. The occurrence of this trait again in the ballad, viewed in connection with the general similarity of the two, will leave no doubt that the ballad had its source in the romance. Yet it is an entirely popular ballad as to style,¹ and must be of considerable age, though the earliest version (A) can be traced at furthest only into the first half of the last century." I, 319 f.

¹ "Excepting the two satirical stanzas with which Scott's version (C) concludes."

Captain Car (178) : "F is purely traditional and has one fine stanza not found in any of the foregoing :

Out then spake the lady Margaret,
As she stood on the stair;
The fire was at her goud garters,
The lowe was at her hair." III, 429.

Queen Eleanor's Confession (156) : "There is reason to question whether this [F] and the other recited versions are anything more than traditional variations of printed copies. The ballad seems first to have got into print in the latter part of the seventeenth century, but was no doubt circulating orally sometime before that, for it is in the truly popular tone." III, 255.

Robin Hood and the Tanner (126) : "The sturdy Arthur a Bland is well hit off, and, bating the sixteenth and thirty-fifth stanzas, the ballad has a good popular ring. There is corruption at 8³, 12³, and perhaps 13³." III, 137.

The earliest Robin Hood ballads (117-121) "are among the best of all ballads, and perhaps none in English please so many and please so long." III, 42.

Robin Hood and the Monk (119) : "Too much could not be said in praise of this ballad, but nothing need be said. It is very perfection in its kind; and yet we have others equally good, and beyond doubt should have had more, if they had been written down early, as this was, and had not been left to the chances of tradition. Even writing would not have saved all, but writing has saved this (in large part), and in excellent form." III, 95.

Child Waters (63) : "This charming ballad, which has perhaps no superior in English, and if not in English perhaps nowhere." II, 84. ("Caution is imperative where so much ground is covered, and no man should be confident that he can do absolute justice to poetry in a tongue that he was not born to; but foreign poetry is as likely to be rated too high as to be undervalued." II, 84, n.)

Jock o the Side (187) : "The ballad is one of the best in the world, and enough to make a horse-trooper of any young borderer, had he lacked the impulse." III, 477.

Sir Patrick Spens (58, A) : "This admired and most admirable ballad." "It would be hard to point out in ballad poetry, or other, happier or more refined touches than the two stanzas in A which portray the bootless waiting of the ladies for the return of the seafarers." II, 17 f.¹

Young Beichan (53) : "A favorite ballad and most deservedly." I, 455.

King Estmere (60) : "While we cannot but be vexed that so distinguished a ballad, not injured much, so far as we can see, by time, should

¹ See also the comment in the *Ballads*, quoted p. 804, below.

not come down to us as it came to Percy, our loss must not be exaggerated. The changes made by the editor, numerous enough, no doubt, cannot be very material until we approach the end. Stanzas 63–66 are entirely suspicious, and it may even be questioned whether the manuscript contained a word that is in them.” II, 49.

Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard (81) : “The noble English ballad.” II, 260.

The Bonny Birdy (82) : “A fine ballad upon the same theme.” II, 243.

Old Robin of Portingale (80) : “This fine ballad.” II, 240.

Sir Aldingar (69) : “This ballad, one of the most important of all that the Percy manuscript has saved from oblivion.” II, 33.

Robin Hood's Death (120) : “B, though found only in late garlands, is in the fine old strain.” III, 103.

Certain ballads are expressly condemned as not “traditional” or “popular” :

Robin Hood Rescuing Will Stutely (141) : “This is a ballad made for print, with little of the traditional in the matter and nothing in the style. It may be considered as an imitation of the Rescue of the Three Squires.” III, 185.

Robin Hood's Birth, Breeding, etc. (149) : “The jocular author of this ballad, who would certainly have been diverted by any one's supposing him to write under the restraints of tradition. . . .” III, 214.

The Lovely Northerne Lasse (217, Appendix) : “There is an English ‘ditty’ (not a traditional ballad) . . . which was printed in the first half of the seventeenth century. It is here given in an appendix.” IV, 192.

To these may be added a few examples of less specific condemnation :

The Earl of Mar's Daughter (270) : A Scandinavian ballad and this “are, perhaps, on a par, for barrenness and folly, but the former may claim some age and vogue, the Scottish ballad neither.” V, 39.

The Drunkard's Legacy (267, Appendix) : “The modern ballad . . . used by Percy was ‘The Drunkard's Legacy,’ an inexpressibly pitiable ditty.” V, 12.

John Thomson and the Turk (266) : “This ridiculous ballad.” V, 1.

Robin Hood and the Tinker (127) : “The fewest words will best befit this contemptible imitation of imitations.” III, 140.

Robin Hood and Maid Marian (150) : “This foolish ditty.” III, 218.

Robin Hood and the Valiant Knight (153) : “Written, perhaps, because it was thought that authority should in the end be vindicated against outlaws, which may explain why this piece surpasses in platitude everything that goes before.” III, 225.

The Suffolk Miracle (272) : "This piece could not be admitted here on its own merits. At the first look, it would be classed with the vulgar prodigies printed for hawkers to sell and for Mopsa and Dorcas to buy. It is not even a good specimen of its kind." v, 58.

We may add from the *Ballads* half-a-dozen examples of specific praise :

The Lass of Lochroyan [76, D]¹ : "This beautiful piece." *Ballads*, II, 98.

The Queen's Marie [173, I] : "Jamieson and Kinloch have each published a highly dramatic fragment of this terrible story." *Ballads*, III, 107.

The Lochmaben Harper [192, A] : "This fine old ballad . . . has the genuine ring of the best days of minstrelsy. On account of its excellence, we give two versions." *Ballads*, VI, 3.

Earl Richard [68, J] : "This gloomy and impressive romance." *Ballads*, III, 3.

Chevy-Chace [162, A] : "Addison's papers in the *Spectator* . . . evince so true a perception of the merits of this ballad [162, B], shorn as it is of the most striking beauties of the grand original, that we cannot but deeply regret his never having seen the ancient and genuine copy ('The noble ballad,' 162, A; *Ballads*, VII, 27), which was published by Hearne only a few days after Addison died." *Ballads*, VII, 43.

Sir Andrew Barton [167, A] : "This noble ballad." *Ballads*, VII, 56.

Sir Patrick Spence [58, A] : "If not ancient, has been always accepted as such by the most skilful judges, and is a solitary instance of a successful imitation, in manner and spirit, of the best specimens of authentic minstrelsy." *Ballads*, III, 149.

VI.

We are now in position to attempt a summary of Professor Child's conception of the popular ballad. He regarded it as a distinct species of poetry, which precedes the poetry of art, as the product of a homogeneous people, the expression of our common human nature, of the mind and heart of the people, never of the personality of an individual man, devoid, therefore, of all subjectivity and self-consciousness.

¹ The numbers in brackets are those affixed to the ballads in the later collection.

Hence the author counts for nothing ; hence, too, the ballad is difficult to imitate and most attempts in this way are ridiculous failures. In transmission the ballad regularly departs from the original form, least in the mouths of unlearned people, more in the hands of professional singers or editors. It is at its best when it has come down by a purely domestic tradition, yet even so it is sometimes influenced by printed literature ; and much depends on the experience and selection of the reciters, and on their varying memory, which is, however, ordinarily remarkable for its tenacity. Less fortunate is the ballad when it passes through low mouths or hands, suffering corruption of various kinds,—in the style of the attorney's clerk, or the housemaid or the serving-man, or ostler, or blind beggar. In the hands of the *bänkelsänger* or of the minstrel, the ballad departs still further from its original form. Or, rewritten for the broadside press, it is seriously enfeebled, or retrenched and marred, though it may retain some original features, and there are thus degrees of departure from the original matter and manner. The broadside may, in turn, become tradition. It is, so far as it appears in Professor Child's later collection, always founded on tradition, and this tradition lives after the composition of the broadside, and may influence the later versions of the printed form. Last comes the modern editor, and by him the ballad is sometimes lengthened,—by combination of different versions, by interpolation of new stanzas, always more or less unlike the popular style ; or it is sometimes “improved,” or retouched, or emended, or altered,—changed to something in glaring contrast to the groundwork. Some results of the vicissitudes of transmission are, the change of the hero's nationality, of his name, of his rôle ; change of the scene of action ; corruption of diction resulting in perversion of sense or in nonsense ; introduction of learned words. The ballad thus suffers in transmission, and is at its

best when it is early caught and fixed in print. It is sometimes counterfeited or imitated, and counterfeits are included in the later collection for contrast, for much the same reason that thieves are photographed, or because they may contain reliques of something genuine or better.

Of the Subject-Matter of the ballad, the sources may be, and in the best instances are, purely popular, consisting of material which appears only in popular literature. Professor Child mentions no instance where a prose tale is the source of a ballad, but the ballad, he says, may sometimes be resolved into a prose tale. Popular origin is attested by foreign parallels in folk-literature. Of such literature certain features or themes are characteristic, such as the quibbling oath, the miraculous harvest, the child-birth in the wood, the testament, the riddle, heroic sentiment, etc. The source may, again, be an actual occurrence, in which case the ballad, while not deliberate fiction, is yet not loyal to the fact. Or the source may be a romance, or the source of a romance, in which case oral tradition may be older than written, the ballad older than the romance. Or the source may be earlier ballads, mechanically and deliberately put together in later ones, made over and assimilated in the *Gest of Robin Hood*. In the course of transmission certain features appear which are not characteristic of popular literature; the subject-matter of the true ballad does not deal in extravagance, or exaggeration, or platitude; it is not prosaic, over-refined, cynical, sophisticated, sentimental, unnatural, trite, or moral, though the "pungent buckishness" of the broadside, and the gay cynicism of the minstrel, are foreign to it.

So far as Technique is concerned, the ballad must have plot. The story may not be completely told; conclusion, transitions, and preliminaries may be omitted; but the result is not nonsense, the ballad is not incoherent. At its best

it is, however, brief. It is careless of geography, and, except in some,—and some of the best,—of the Robin Hood ballads, it touches Setting lightly. In dealing with the Supernatural it does not attempt to explain the action or to describe supernatural figures; ghosts, however, do not walk without reason.

In Style the ballad is artless and homely, and in it the conceit, and literary or learned words and phrases, are out of place. Yet it has certain conventions of its own, such as the "commonplace," the repetition of a message by a messenger, the verbally similar treatment of similar incidents as they occur in different ballads. Emotionally, the ghost ballad is impressive and affecting; and, in general, the ballad may be infectious, or spirited and life-like, or pathetic, or tender, or humorous, or vigorous and not lacking in color or flavor. It is essentially lyrical, and its lyrical quality is not less essential than plot. Often it absolutely requires the support of a melody and the comment of a burden. This burden sometimes foreshadows the calamity, sometimes enhances by contrast the gloom of the conclusion. It is usually less than the stanza with which it was sung; and, unlike the refrain, it was sung, not after the stanza, but with it. It is sometimes of different metre, sometimes not. The absence of the burden is in no case proof that it never existed.

WALTER MORRIS HART.